

JOE BACA

43RD DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

WASHINGTON OFFICE:

2245 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-0543
PHONE: (202) 225-6161
FAX: (202) 225-8671
E-MAIL: CONG.BACA@MAIL.HOUSE.GOV

DISTRICT OFFICE:

201 NORTH E STREET, SUITE 102
SAN BERNARDINO, CA 92401
PHONE: (909) 885-BACA (2222)
FAX: (909) 888-5959



**Congress of the United States
House of Representatives**

COMMITTEES

AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE

CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON
DEPARTMENT OPERATIONS,
OVERSIGHT, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY

FINANCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

CAUCUSES

CONGRESSIONAL HISPANIC CAUCUS

CHAIR, CORPORATE AMERICA TASK FORCE

COMMUNICATIONS, TECHNOLOGY,
AND THE ARTS TASK FORCE

BLUE DOG COALITION

January 11, 2010

The Honorable Julius Genachowski,
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20554

0025

Re: *Empowering Parents and Protecting Children in an Evolving Media Landscape*, MB
Docket No. 09-194

Dear Chairman Genachowski:

I write to submit my comments about my concerns regarding the effects that violent and otherwise inappropriate media can have on the development of our nation's youth. Specifically, I am concerned about the effect that violent video games can have, especially as the use of video games become more prominent in our society. I have long advocated stricter regulation for video games that display violent or sexually inappropriate material, having introduced and sponsored several pieces of legislation on this topic during my time in Congress.

Over the past 30 years our country has seen dramatic advancements in the technology, performance, capability, and use of video game systems. 30 years ago, children were limited to playing a simple game of Pong. Today, users can play a game of Madden Football against each other even if they are on different sides of the country. And, while the advancement of these games should be applauded, the growing use and time spent with these products should continue to be tightly monitored.

In the past decade there have been many studies linking increased video game use to obesity, decreased motivation and social skills, and aggressive behavior. All of these studies are incredibly troubling, and I fear that unless more is done to curb the increased dependency on video games, these links will be more become stronger and more pronounced.

Detrimental Physical Effects

According to a report issued by the American Medical Association released in 1983, there has been a considerable amount of evidence gathered linking epileptic seizure with

playing video games. In a population study based in the United Kingdom in 1993, this phenomenon was more prevalent in children between the ages of 7 and 19 than the rest of the population.

Moreover, as the time spent playing video games increases among our nation's youth, the obesity rate among our children continues to grow as many studies have found. This seems perfectly logical, as spending time playing video games will obviously not allow a child to expend the energy that it would take to play outside with friends.

Detrimental Behavioral Effects

Recent studies have also found signs of addiction in children and other individuals who spend increased time gaming. Earlier this year, a study from Iowa State University found that 8.5% of American youths ages 8 to 18 who play video games show multiple signs of behavioral addiction. Symptoms of gaming addiction include spending increased amounts of time on playing or purchasing video games; irritability/restlessness when play is scaled back; skipping chores or homework in order to play more; and lying about the length of playing time. As a result of this addiction, the study found that the children had trouble paying attention in class and performed worse in school.

Additionally, there is a growing argument that can be made for a link between the playing of violent video games and aggressive behavior. Recent studies from the *Pediatrics Journal*, University of Indiana, University of Missouri, and Michigan State University all point to a neurological link between playing violent video games and aggressive behavior in children.

Industry's Attempts

The video game industry has undertaken attempts to regulate their products, employing the ESRB rating system which works similar to the MPAA rating system for motion pictures. However, while all games possess a rating label on the cover of the game, the game's content often does not reflect its rating, with games that possess child-friendly ratings possessing violent or otherwise inappropriate content.

I fear that the loopholes and inaccuracies that exist within the rating system will never be fully addressed simply because of who implements these ratings. The video game industry is one driven by profit, not a duty to look out for the best interests of the American family. Our government must do everything they can to hold the industry accountable to ensure parents are aware of the detrimental effects that violent games can have before making decisions as to which games are appropriate for their children.

Last year, I introduced H.R. 231, the Video Game Health Labeling Act of 2009. This bill creates a new rule within the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) that mandates all video games with an Electronics Software Ratings Board (ESRB) rating of Teen (T) or higher be sold with a simple warning label which reads: ***"WARNING: Excessive exposure to violent video games and other violent media has been linked to aggressive behavior."***

As your commission examines this initiative, I ask that you consider this bill and how it will aid parents in protecting their children from potential pitfalls of evolving media. Only through comprehensive policy can we successfully ensure that parents protect their children to the best of their ability.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Joe Baca", with a stylized flourish at the end.

JOE BACA, Congressman
43rd Congressional District



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

March 3, 2010

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

The Honorable Joe Baca
U.S. House of Representatives
2245 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Baca:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Commission's *Notice of Inquiry* to examine the role that electronic media play in the lives of American children. In your letter, you express particular concern that certain video game content may be harmful to children, and may be linked to obesity, decreased social skills, and aggressive behavior.

The evolving media landscape has the potential to produce innovation and new business models to increase the amount of educational programming and content available to all children. However, as discussed in your correspondence, digital media also may pose risks to children, including exposing them to exploitative advertising and inappropriate content, as well as potentially contributing to negative health effects, such as childhood obesity. The vital role of government in this media environment is to work to help ensure that parents have access to the full range of information concerning digital media content that will educate and entertain their children while also providing the tools necessary to protect children from inappropriate content.

The Commission's *Notice of Inquiry* seeks information concerning how and to what extent children are using electronic media today, the benefits and risks this presents, and the ways in which parents, teachers, and children can help realize the benefits while minimizing the risks of using these technologies. The period for the submission of public comments in response to the *Notice of Inquiry* is scheduled to close on March 26, 2010. At that time, the Commission's Media Bureau will commence its evaluation of the record compiled in the proceeding and develop recommendations for the Commission's consideration.

I appreciate learning your views on this important matter. As you requested, a copy of your correspondence has been included in the record of the *Notice of Inquiry* proceeding. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Julius Genachowski", is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "J".

Julius Genachowski